



Outstanding Practice in
AGROECOLOGY 2019



FACTSHEET

China – Shared Harvest and Rural Regeneration (2009)

IN BRIEF

Since 2008, Dr. Shi Yan has been implementing Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in China, after popularizing the term as part of her PhD research. CSA is a community-owned socio-economic mode of agriculture, where producers and growers provide mutual support and share the risk of food production. The system operates according to a system of delivery and collection of organic and locally produced food to 600 families in Beijing. Operations are based on 'Shared Harvest' farm, where farmers and live-in 'interns' are also trained in CSA methods. After 2008, a surge of 1,000 farms have converted to CSA methods and continue to grow despite policy barriers. In Beijing, Dr. Yan has created a CSA education center and hosted in 2015 the 6th International CSA Symposium in China.

ABOUT THE PRACTICE AT A GLANCE

Organisation: China CSA Network (NGO), Shared Harvest Farm (Social enterprise)

Implemented in: Shunyi district, Beijing (China)

Year: 2009, 2012

Beneficiaries: Smallholders

Topic(s): Production, Distribution, Consumption, Community Supported Agriculture

PROBLEMS TARGETED / CONTEXT

The practice aims to fight against the modern and conventional agriculture, as implemented in China since the seventies, which is responsible for air pollution and soil degradation (through use of fertilizers and pesticides). Agricultural modernisation since economic opening of China has left its contemporary farmers weak and atomized and village life has been 'hollowed out', with only the very young and very old remaining.

Even the government's recent slide towards 'ecological' farming methods is clear in its promotion of modern, industrial agriculture. This practice seeks to support smallholders, food safety, youth trainings and social justice by advocating for a sustainable and biological agriculture.

The concept of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) was coined in China by Dr. Shi Yan, a young academic who became a farmer after working in the Earthrise Farm, a small CSA in western Minnesota. In 2008, Shi Yan build her first CSA in China, the organic Little Donkey Farm, in a village northwest of Beijing. In 2009 China's CSA network was launched. In 2012, after 5 years of development and supported by Renmin University of China and Tsinghua University, Shared Harvest started as an initiative to offer urban people safer food and to train farmers and especially youth in sustainable agriculture and CSA methods. As a result, an ambitious movement for community supported agriculture took off.

KEY FEATURES OF THE SOLUTION

The main goal of Shared Harvest is to promote a healthy lifestyle, serve agricultural producers and consumers, and try to promote sustainable rural development. Real food, real farmers, sincere community, it is committed to building a bridge of trust, allowing consumers to truly enjoy healthy and safe food, so that producers get a fair and reasonable income, and promote the construction and development of a safe food community.

Shared Harvest is a public-interested, service-oriented social enterprise started by a group of young people, under leadership of Dr Shi Yan, in Mafang Village of Eastern Beijing in May 2012. They adopt Community-Supported-Agriculture (CSA) model to cooperate with local farmers in Beijing producing local, seasonal and organically-grown veggies and other food products. They invite urban citizens to become members connecting with the people who grow the food for them, getting back to the earth and the nature. In 2013, they developed their production scale from one to two farms, located in Tongzhou and Shunyi District. They also expanded their products to farmer's markets, local restaurants, schools, and organizations interested in purchasing directly from us.

Shared Harvest currently includes the following aspects: It promotes the concept and the practice of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), a socio-economic mode of agriculture and food production. It consists of a community of individuals who pledge to support a farming operation, in effect making the farmland community-owned. Growers and producers provide mutual support and share the risk of food production. Members/supporters pay a fee and then receive a share of the produce. The CSA usually operates according to a system of weekly delivery and collection of boxes of fruit and vegetables, dairy products or meat. In this context, people receive 200kg of vegetables per year. The consumers of Shared Harvest are either byers who purchase her organic products every week or self-farming customers, who cultivate crops on 30 square meters of rented land. Both groups sign contracts with the farm and pay certain costs in advance.

Shared Harvest supports sustainable and organic agriculture. It believes in small-scale agriculture, in recycling and in other practices that have been used in China over centu-

ries before the industrialization of agriculture. It trains returning consumers and “new farmers” – the name for (young) agricultural converts to the CSA methods. Dr. Shi Yan is actively involved in the National Steering Committee of Agricultural Vocational training, a training that supports a new agriculture, which works with technology and a modern business philosophy. In order to learn about crop sharing, cultivation methods and farm management, 5 to 10 “new farmers” become interns at a farm for at least 8 months and receive a small stipend in addition to room and board. Short term volunteers are also welcomed. In addition, Shared Harvest and Good Farm APP Cooperation Organization teach CSA agriculture to new farmers. The practice also advocates for healthy eating and food education in schools. Sharing crop orchards aim to connect youth to agriculture and to learn about crop sharing. The programme cooperates with 8 schools and universities.

Over 60 categories of vegetables are shared annually and distributed to consumers. Distribution and production depend on the principle of local, organic production standards. Produce is not certified organic (as due to new standards introduced in 2013, requiring each crop to be certified separately, certification would cost CNY150,000 per year or €19,164). Biological agents are used for the prevention and treatment of soils, plants and pests instead of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. To facilitate the transition of conventional farmers to biological agriculture, they sometimes authorize the use of small amount of pesticides (transparent records for consumers). Currently, common harvest is distributed to 1,000 families.

An internet platform & app was created for CSA farms in order to exchange information and to recruit new members. The platform & app reduced the farmer’s labor costs, since the number of service representatives was reduced from 3 to 1. The programme also provides organic farm consulting and supports social activities related to ecology, environmental protection, education and advocates for a simple lifestyle. Recently Beijing local government has begun to support ecological farming. For example, if you use organic fertilizer, they will subsidize 70%. Shared Harvest also uses biogas supported by local government.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

- Holistic approach, promoting social, economic and ecology sustainability.
- Innovates concepts of ecology and environmental protection, agricultural technology, organizational form, publicity and education.
- Builds a “food community”, using the PGS approach, based on guided peer review and support, as well as mutual knowledge building.
- Promotes short circuits, by linking directly producers and consumers, and by creating awareness on food production and organic agriculture.

FACTS & FIGURES

- By 2017, Shared Harvest owns 60 mu of vegetable planting base and 110 mu of forest land breeding base in Mafang Village, Xiji Town, Tongzhou District, has 50 mu in Longwanyu Town, Shunyi District, a 230-mu vegetable planting / fruit tree base and a 60-mu

rice planting base in Wuchang, Heilongjiang.

- It currently has 1,000 CSA members and 50 employees (producers, food service and traders). Its consumer base comprises 800 members from Beijing who subscribe and pay in advance to shield farmers from instability. Growing number of 'group buyers' (300 in 2016), who collectively order goods for weekly pickup at 5 locations in Beijing.
- The total running expenses for 20 working weeks on the farm is 2,000 to 2,500 yuan (\$293 to \$366). The farm guarantees each contractor at least 200 kilograms of fresh organic food.
- According to the nomination, in the past 10 years, 50,000 people have been trained / informed each year about CSA, 20% of them are smallholders and the rest is the public. 200 trainings were organized and Dr Yan provided 500 services as advisor. The "Have Seed, Have Courage Initiative" involved more than 1 million people.

OUTCOME, IMPACT & EFFECTIVENESS

- Dr. Yan's CSA techniques have (since 2008) spread to 1,000 Chinese farms, which have converted to CSA methods, equaling 500,000mu (33,334 ha) of chemical and pesticide free land.
- Farmers at Shared Harvest earn 3,000 to 4,000 Yuan (USD 370-630) a month, which is comparable to workers in second or third tier cities employed in basic white collar work.
- According to the nomination, it reduced the use of 2,500 thousand tons of synthetic pesticides; stopped pesticide use by 240,000 liters, and reduced industrial-sized processing of animal waste by 25,000 thousand cubic meters. Furthermore, by bringing the CSA model to Chinese farmers, it has transformed the lives for over 100,000 farmers who are part of the CSA farms by increasing family incomes. Since the introduction of CSA farms in China, over 500,000 families are now sourcing their food directly from organically grown farms.

OUTLOOK, TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY & COST-EFFICIENCY

The cost of implementation of the practice encompasses land cost, production cost, infrastructure input labor cost, qualified consultant cost, accommodation and transportation cost, etc. The farms are funded through a group of consumers and farmers (not much investment is needed). The total running expenses for 20 working weeks on the farm is 2000 to 2500 yuan (\$292.8 to \$366).

The CSA concept is already replicated all over China. Up-scaling the practice would require food education and technical support, training and supportive policies. Integrated technology systems (production, customers' service, agroecology practice, etc.) would help make huge improvements.

INTERVIEWEE FEEDBACK

Number of points: 23 out of 23

Summary: The interviewee provided a good insight into the development of Shared Harvest, its values, methods and training schemes, as well as interactions with custo-

1 (Sustainable use of resources) - 6/6 – Optimises use of natural resources through animal-sourced fertiliser, compost and biogas use. On soil level, big changes have been noticed in terms of the amount of worms. Diversity is a focus of activities, noted an increase in wild animals around. The project has been self-financing since the beginning – last year's income was around \$1.5million with a profit of 10%, used to build new green house, to start new projects.

2 (Equity and eradication of poverty) - 4/4 – Poverty is key, aims to make consumers and farmers equal, so that consumers contribute to good livelihood. Creates jobs for youths through internships and more women on the farm than men. Reaches local consumers and markets.

3 (Precautionary approach to human health, natural resources and ecosystems) - 2 / 2 – Organic farming is fundamental for human health – healthy soil, environment and food.

4 (Public participation and access to information) - 3/3 – Spreads awareness regarding where food comes from through social media and practical training programmes. Extensive work with farmers' cooperatives, NGOs, embassies, schools and universities. A lot of knowledge exchange between farmers.

5 (Governance and human security) 3/3 – Established a consumers' core group. Annual meeting of stakeholders, all things are transparent, simple structure with no room for corruption. Farmers get trained up as sustainable managers of their own natural resources.

6 (Integration, interrelationship- human rights, social, economic and environmental objectives) - 3/3 – Socioeconomic and environmental integration is at heart. Healthy soil, food and people. Good relationship with people has developed because of this. Promotes healthy diet and re-connection to nature, which has been lost through city life.

7 (Common but differentiated obligations) - 2/2 – CSA is a global concept, has been replicated throughout the world, but here it is specifically implemented for a Chinese context.

CONTACT

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LINKS AND FURTHER READING

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